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Russia's Peacetime Battlefield

Presidential versus General Staff Military Reform

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Conclusions

- President Boris Yeltsin's restructuring concept (approved in July 1997) for the armed forces under the Ministry of Defense is unpopular in the military and serious obstacles have caused several revisions. The concept may be further revised or even discarded over the next two years.
- Yeltsin's indifference to the impact of military reform on readiness, and continual attempts by the General Staff to expand military—and political—control present serious problems for reform.
- Economic and political reformers, closely associated with Yeltsin, will continue attempts to weaken the military's potential political influence and reduce the military's economic burden on Russia.
- The General Staff is likely to publicly support "reform" even as it attempts to consolidate control over all of Russia's military forces.
- Rampant crime may lead law-and-order presidential candidates to endorse the totalitarian-like domestic command system proposed by the Chief of the General Staff. The military—always a potential king-maker in Russian politics—would then be in a good position to dictate the terms of its own "reform."

Yeltsin's 1997 Concept of Reform

Concurrent with appointing Igor Sergeyev Minister of Defense in May 1997, President Yeltsin established two presidential commissions to make recommendations on how to proceed with reform of the Russian military forces. The first commission, under then Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, was to recommend priority measures for reform and organizational changes needed to support reform. It was also to analyze the operational costs of the Ministry of Defense (MOD) in particular. (President Yeltsin had already limited future budgets of the Defense Ministry to 3.5 percent of the gross national product.) The second commission, under then First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoliy Chubais, was to explore possible methods that could be used to fund the Russian military forces in the future.

The immediate results of the Chernomyrdin commission were a series of presidential decrees on

"military reform." These decrees were aimed at restructuring, downsizing, and changing the chain-of-command authority within the Ministry of Defense only.

The July 1997 "military reform" decrees clearly embodied the essence of what President Yeltsin wanted to do. They focused on the MOD itself, redesigning its chain of operational command to reduce the authority of service commanders-in-chief, while increasing that of the Chief of the General Staff and the military district commanders. The Ground Forces—a major seat of resistance to political control since 1992—was to have been abolished and turned into two directorates under the General Staff.

Under the July decrees, components of other services were to re-combine in a series of steps that would eventually reduce the services under the Ministry of Defense from five to three and reduce the headquarters staffs of most existing organizations by approximately 30 percent. The new Minister of Defense emphasized the near-term increase in readiness that would be achieved in the units that were to remain and forecasted that Ministry of Defense forces would be fully equipped with 21st century weapons and technology in little more than a decade. (He later changed the forecasted completion date to the year 2025.)

The General Staff's Grand Design

From the beginning the General Staff had an agenda that differed from that of the President. Chief of the General Staff, Colonel General Anatolii Kvashnin, immediately became the driving force behind the Chernomyrdin commission. By the fall of last year, reports of the commission's work indicated that it was, in large measure, advocating the same reorganization plan that had been advocated by two previous Chiefs of the General Staff—despite Yeltsin's previous rejections of those plans.

The plan reportedly called for the General Staff to have peacetime and wartime control over major activities of all military forces—including those outside the Ministry of Defense. The General Staff is already charged with developing mobilization plans and coordinating contingency wartime operation plans for the non-MOD "power" ministries, as well as taking operational control of them in wartime. Last year, however, under the guise of military reform, the General Staff reportedly again attempted to assign itself authority to approve all plans for peacetime training, force development, and weapons procurement for the non-MOD forces.

Kvashnin's proposal also extended the General Staff's control to officer personnel matters within the non-MOD militaries. First, Kvashnin—as have others—called for the drastic reduction and consolidation of military schools and training facilities throughout the various ministries on the grounds that money was being wasted on unnecessary duplication. His proposal called for the consolidation to take place under the MOD. At the same time, there were calls for MOD officers to be assigned to the other ministries in order to raise the professionalism within those ministries. This call appears to also be based on widely shared assessments.

The practical results of such personnel moves, however, would be that the General Staff would gain wide control over officer training and assignments in all Russia's military forces. The political implications of such an arrangement had to be noticed by President Yeltsin.

The most threatening of Kvashnin's "reform" proposals, however, was the plan to consolidate military control throughout Russia into six military districts directly under the Chief of the General Staff. Presently, the districts within each of the so-called power ministries have distinct borders and commanders who report directly to their own ministries. Kvashnin proposed three changes: district

boundaries in all of the power ministries be redrawn to coincide; commanders of the non-MOD districts be subordinated to the MOD district commanders-in-chief; and the MOD district commanders-in-chief be given operational control over all forces assigned to their districts.

While President Yeltsin supported the idea of increasing the authority of the MOD military district commanders at the expense of the service commanders, there is every reason to believe that he would not have approved of the idea of subordinating districts from other ministries to the MOD district commanders. In fact, it would be completely out of character for Yeltsin to support a move that would consolidate the powers of the other "power" ministries under the General Staff or any other component of the Ministry of Defense. In both the August 1991 coup against Mikhail Gorbachev and the October 1993 confrontation with the Russian legislature, the Russian (Soviet) armed forces commanders showed themselves too willing to act at variance with their political leaders.

The Military Budget Battle

More than a year ago, President Yeltsin decreed that no more than 3.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) would be allocated to the MOD budget. The new Minister of Defense (General Igor Sergeyev) and Chief of the General Staff General Kvashnin have accepted this restriction. Instead of fighting for more money, they decided to extend the deadline for completing the reforms sought by the military. When they first took over in May of 1997, the two generals accepted that reform (usually described by Russian military analysts as reequipping the armed forces with state of the art equipment) would be completed by the year 2010. By the fall of 1997, however, Sergeyev revised his forecast to the year 2025.

Sergeyev's new deadline will probably be extended further. Not only was his forecast based on the Ministry of Defense receiving 3.5 percent of the GDP every year without fail, it did not take account of the social costs the ministry must pay when it reduces the size of its active duty force. Another extension, however, will result in major dissension in the MOD.

Serious questions have already been raised as to whether the 3.5 percent ceiling itself is adequate for the reforms currently envisioned. In December 1997, at a conference attended by Andrei Kokoshin (the new Security Council Secretary), Colonel Viktor Tkachev of the military's Financial Academy said that even if Russia experienced economic growth, 3.5 percent would only provide for the proper maintenance of an armed forces of 700,000. Without growth, he said, only 500,000-550,000 soldiers could be fully maintained to the standard of the armies of West European countries.

Tkachev maintains that Russia has a dual criterion for optimizing the Ministry of Defense forces: (1) developing military forces that can protect against an external threat; and, (2) developing military forces according to Russia's economic potential. He argues that failure to reconcile these conflicting aims will lead to some departments pursuing one aim while other departments pursue the other. He concludes that Russia must accept a McNamara formula of "the maximum defense capability per dollar of expenditure."

However, there is no indication that Yeltsin will impose a McNamara-type rule on Russian bureaucracy. Consequently, the Finance Ministry can be expected to continue limiting MOD funding allocations—even below the amount requested by the President and authorized by the legislature. The Ministry of Defense, in turn, can be expected to continue lobbying the president and the legislature for whatever money it can get.

The Defense Industry Battle

Financing the military is not the only funding problem connected with the General Staff's military reform proposal. The General Staff's plan also called for a major phased reduction in Russia's military industrial complex based on the needs of the military—from 1,749 core defense enterprises in 1997, to 667 in 2000, and 435 in 2005. However, it is unlikely that such a plan could be carried out. Not only have the defense enterprises effectively resisted all previous top-down organized efforts towards conversion of defense enterprises to domestic production, the Russian state has consistently failed to adequately fund those programs upon which there has been agreement.

Military factory conversion programs for the past six years have been more than disappointing, leaving factories unprepared to continue military production or converted to the production of consumer products. Factory production orders and operation funds were severely reduced on the grounds that the products were no longer needed.

At the same time, the Russian government reduced incentives for the factories to initiate their own local conversion programs by continuing to provide just enough social benefits to workers to keep them tied to their jobs, and, by failing to provide conversion program funds promised to the factories. The Economic Minister, Yakov Urinson, reported that in 1995 the government provided factories only 25 percent of the funds authorized in the budget for conversion programs. The figure dropped to 11 percent in 1996 and zero percent in 1997.

Where Does It All Stand?

At the beginning of 1998, President Yeltsin put a halt to the General Staff's grandiose plan for military reform. No specific public announcement was made that the plan was dead in the water, but it was.

In the first months in 1998, President Yeltsin abolished the Defense Council and its staff—under which the General Staff (under the mantle of the Chernomyrdin commission) had been preparing its program for re-organizing the militaries and industrial complex. Although Yeltsin stated that the Security Council would pick up responsibility for preparing plans for military reform, he picked Andrei Kokoshin—a cautious man—to head the Security Council. Yeltsin's recent statements that Prime Minister Sergei Kirienko would pick up Chernomyrdin's responsibilities for military reform also have an empty ring to them.

Essentially, Yeltsin has achieved what he sought to do under the rubric "military reform." He has set in motion a program for large-scale downsizing and reorganizing the armed forces under the Ministry of Defense and even started to reduce the size of the other "power" ministries. It is unlikely that his interest in military reform ever extended any further than this.

This does not mean, however, that the battle for Russian military reform is over. Russian security specialists disagree over key issues, such as the nature of the war that the military can be expected to fight in the near future. The issue may have appeared to have been put to rest, at first, when Yeltsin approved a Security Council Concept paper in December 1997 stating the main threat to national security no longer comes from large-scale aggression, but from internal economic and social problems and ethnic tensions. However, disagreements with this assessment have been expressed from several quarters.

Additionally, President Yeltsin's reform decrees for the MOD have resulted in major fights within the

ministry as services and general officers fight to protect their preserves. After Kvashnin put the long held plan of the General Staff on the table to establish its control over the other power ministries, the fighting spread throughout the government. It did not stop when Yeltsin made it clear that Kvashnin's plan was politically unacceptable. In January and February, the Federal Security Service attempted to extend its control over the Federal Border Service. It is unlikely that the battle among the power ministries—and within the MOD itself—will end in the near future.

Abolishing the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces clearly was important to President Yeltsin. Because the Ground Forces had been the largest and most politically dominant service, and had led the MOD's resistance to military reform, he had hoped to abolish a major source of the political resistance. However, it appears, that because Yeltsin perceived Kvashnin's recommendations to be as much a threat as the Ground Forces had been, he assigned the Commander-in-Chief's oversight functions to the office of the Minister of Defense, not the General Staff.

Russia's Many Militaries

There are 14 ministries and departments within the Russian government that have military troops under their control. The General Staff has suggested draftees be provided to only the following military organizations:

The Ministry of Defense (MOD)
The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)
The Federal Security Service (FSB)
The Federal Border Service (FPS)

Yeltsin's Original Reforms for the Ministry of Defense

Phase I (1997-2000)

Main Focus:

Increase readiness and technical standards by reducing the overall force structure that has to be maintained; reduce to 1.2 million men; improve conditions for the soldiers

Command Changes:

Give military districts commanders operational control of forces assigned to their districts

Abolish Commander-in-Chief of Ground Forces position

Establish an unified "Strategic Missile Force" based on current components:

Strategic Missile Forces
Military Space Forces
Missile and Space Defense Force

Combine Air Forces and remaining Air Defense Forces

Retain the Navy with four fleets and a flotilla, but downsize

Research and Development Policy:

No purchases of old equipment; develop experimental models of breakthrough technology

Phase II (2000-2005)

Switch to Three Services:

According to General Staff spokesmen, these would be based on "spheres of combat"—ground, air/space, sea. (This likely reflects a General Staff's plan to align service support with operational commands.)

Research and Development Policy:

Start to deliver state of the art arms and equipment by 2005.

The General Staff's Military Reform Proposal

The General Staff took the lead in elaborating the idea of military reform for the Chernomyrdin commission. The commission's work has not been published, but it appears it worked in general consonance with Yeltsin's original tasking. The emphasis by the commission's working group on establishing strict General Staff control over all aspects of military activity in Russia, however, was at complete variance with President Yeltsin's desire to reduce MOD political influence. Key aspects of the General Staff proposal are as follows:

Command Changes:

Give the General Staff peacetime and wartime control over all military forces (MOD and non-MOD) through the MOD Military District Commanders.

Reform of the MOD:

Accept the reforms decreed by Yeltsin in July 1997.

Non-MOD Militaries:

Reduce all Russian military forces in a manner that does not challenge MOD political influence or destabilize the state.

MOD: Reduce from 1.9 to 1.2 million soldiers

MVD: Reduce from 257,000 to 220,000 soldiers

FSB: Not published in Russian press

FPS: Maintain current strength at 143,000

Military Industrial Complex:

Make Russia's military industrial complex responsive to General Staff planning requirements.

Re-Establishing an "Iron-Hand"

General Kvashnin's proposal regarding military districts is even more explosive when one considers that he has also recommended that the President divide the country into a limited number of "administrative" districts and assign a plenipotentiary representative to implement all political and economic decisions within those districts. It is not a far reach to conclude that Kvashnin's administrative districts and consolidated military districts would coincide.

Kvashnin's grand reorganization scheme is nothing short of totalitarian in nature. It will have great appeal to Russia's "law and order" presidential candidates in the run-up to the elections in the year 2000—including Mayor Lushkov of Moscow, who has also suggested the idea of plenipotentiary administrative districts.

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